

The Birth of American Catholic Theology

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Abstract

The eighty years of *Theological Studies* bear witness to the birth of American Catholic theology. This article traces that development through five stages. During its first two decades scholasticism reigned and authority was watchful. Vatican II then introduced a period of change, followed by a thirty-five-year creative phase in which a modern consciousness discussed new issues. By the final period corresponding to Francis's papacy, an American Catholic theology was in place.

Keywords

American Catholicism, authority, Catholic theology, development of doctrine, experience in theology, history of theology, theological method

This article tells the story of the birth of American theology¹ and celebrates the eightieth anniversary of *Theological Studies*. It does not include Catholic theologians who wrote in the nineteenth century or earlier, like Orestes Brownson, or others who have contributed outside the pages of *TS*. While the title thus overstates the role of this journal in the birth of American Catholic theology, it calls attention to

1. I usually, but not always, understand “American” to mean “North American” because in fact Canadians are regular contributors to the journal. There is ambiguity here, especially with reference to history and cultural values, but in theological construction the boundaries have to be porous. In recent years we are reminded, too, by Latino/a theologians, that the term “American” can also extend to the Americas as a whole.

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its illustrative value and role as a vehicle and witness to Catholic theology's coming of age. It also co-opts the voice of Canadians who were early and strong contributors to *TS* and others who came after them.²

Several decisions have allowed me to introduce, describe, and appraise the extensive witness to this development in a relatively brief presentation. First, I have divided the eighty years into five periods of unequal length and importance. The division is somewhat arbitrary, but it helps to mark the changing times and contexts of a consistent story. A present-day lens defines the perspective; still lively issues incline one to notice as important earlier discussions that propose analogies or contrasts to problems that linger.³

To highlight the development along the way, each period is named and introduced as presenting a distinctive context. These artificial borders help mark the incremental development. The presentation of each period will look at the most prominent topics, authors, and the positions they represent, and conclude with a characterization of the theology of that time. Full references to all the articles consulted are minimized, because this is not a bibliographical essay but a narrative account of the birth of a distinct tradition. I have included names of many theologians, sometimes in footnotes to keep the flow of the narrative, but as a constant reminder of collective authorship. The mention of so many articles traces the many small steps in the forward progress of the narrative and the measure of the final interpretation. The title also suggests more than it says. For example, it implies that Catholicism contains more theologies than just one. American theology will take its place alongside Roman theology and innumerable other cultural contributions. It implies that in 1940 such an American theology did not exist and that today it does.

Finally, a hypothesis about American Catholic theology has emerged in the reading. Formulated first as a question, it guides the analysis and provides a theme that supports the interpretation like an undercurrent to a floating object. It wonders whether American Catholic theology began as a reporting and expository theology based on authority and gradually moved towards becoming a theology based on cultural experience, both local and global, that critically appropriates the tradition. The birth was completed with an American Catholic theology that both depends on church authority and shares in it with a distinct constructive role of critically interpreting it. Does the story of *TS* support the increasing distinctiveness of American Catholic theology?

2. I refer to *Theological Studies* here as *TS*, and the volume and number are represented with two numbers: for example, 1.1. represents volume 1, number 1. Issues were published quarterly in March, June, September, and December. Many articles, some indeed very influential, were not written by Americans, but by being published in *TS* they have fed into American theology. A fuller picture of the development of American Catholic theology would need to consult other journals, such as *The Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* and *Horizons*, the journal of The College Theology Society, not to mention other journals and the work of Catholic theologians generally.

3. I regret being unable to attend proportionately to sacramental, liturgical, pastoral, and spiritual theology and remain within imposed boundaries. Other articles will deal with the history of *TS* and the moral theology contained in it. To further complicate matters, some topics, such as church–world relations, social sin, and LGBTQ liberation theology, for example, shifted their venue from theology to ethics.

After the Condemnation of Modernism: 1940–1951

Theological Studies published its first volume in the middle of one of the most distinctive periods of the history of the Catholic Church. In the late nineteenth century various Catholic thinkers addressed the intellectual milieu in order to make Christian faith intelligible to the modern mind. This effort appeared to threaten the scholastic system of philosophy and theology that was in place. The reaction culminated first in a strong condemnation of a construct of the movement labeled “Modernism,” and this was followed by setting up watchdog committees in the dioceses that removed tainted professors from their positions. By the beginning of the Great War in 1914 a whole intellectual movement was shut down, and with it the church lost its persistent drive to understand and communicate. Gradually during the 1930s this inner quest was awakening mainly through historical studies. But the shadow of suspicion and fear that authority cast over the entire theological enterprise diminished the whole church. *TS* helped give rise to some green shoots in the scorched fields of intellectual creativity.

One can notice in the first issue of *TS* an oblique sign of the times in an article entitled “Current Theology.” This article surveyed what was currently going on in the discipline; this kind of article became a standard feature of the journal. Much of the content was European. But the form of the article tells more than the subject matter, for it was laid out according to the tracks of manual theology. A manual for each of approximately ten compartmentalized units, often generated in Rome, formed the scholastic system. Teaching aimed at internalizing the system and was virtually the same around the world; the research reported in this article either whittled away at the edges or represented *approfondissement* rather than change.

I noted that anti-Modernism diverted intellectual energy toward history, and the first decade of *TS* contained a good deal of historical studies. This historical or “positive” theology analyzed theologians of the past to enrich the present-day imagination, especially the Fathers of the church and Aquinas. Pope Leo XIII gave a strong endorsement to Aquinas’s theology in the late nineteenth century, and this stimulated a new historical appreciation of texts.

Three overlapping theological conversations that were going on in Europe were picked up in the pages of *TS* during the first decade. The first is the theological movement in France that became known as *la nouvelle théologie*. It had roots in the philosophy of Maurice Blondel and his philosophical turn to analysis of the dynamism of the human subject. As a framework for thinking, this enabled theologians to give new positive readings to classical theologians like Thomas Aquinas that were more flexible and relevant to the present time. Another theme occupied a number of articles in *TS*: the connection of the supernatural order and natural human existence. Distinct but often aligned with the “New Theology,” this discussion was stimulated by an important study by Henri de Lubac after the war.⁴ And, finally, the question of the

4. This work originally appeared in a curtailed edition in 1946; it was republished as Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991). Philip J. Donnelly wrote an extensive survey of the reaction to this book in “Discussions on the Supernatural Order,” in 9.2.

development of doctrine preoccupied Catholic theology since the magisterial essay of John Henry Newman in the nineteenth century.⁵ This important issue responded to the question of how a doctrine can change over history and yet remain the same, and that required a subtle understanding of the very nature of a doctrinal statement.

A few articles over this period addressed issues that were less focused on matters internal to Catholic dogmatics and showed an interest in the broader world outside. One of these is ecumenism, a topic that had to be addressed with caution because the formal reaction of the Vatican in 1928 stated that the only resolution to Christian division was return to Rome.⁶ Two articles, largely reportorial, appeared in the first volume of *TS*, and in December of 1950 Gustave Weigel wrote an extensive article on “Protestant Theological Positions Today” (11.4). Evolution provided another delicate topic for Catholic theology during this decade. An article in 1.4 on “Saint Thomas and the Evolution of Man” concluded forcefully, “there is nothing in Saint Thomas which affords any support to the theory of the evolution of man’s body.”⁷

The work of two theologians dominated the authorship in *TS* during its first decade: Bernard Lonergan and John Courtney Murray. Both born in 1904, Murray finished his doctorate at the Gregorian University in 1937, Lonergan in 1940. Lonergan developed two seminal themes, each with a series of articles during the 1940s. The one concentrated on God working in the world as seen through the lens of actual grace, *gratia operans*, and how to understand the dynamics of grace and freedom. His other line of investigation, often called the “*Verbum*” articles, dealt not with the incarnate Word but with Thomistic metaphysics of cognition.⁸ Both of these series of articles consisted of meticulous analysis of the development of Aquinas’s thought across his corpus.

The line of Murray’s thinking was quite different: he might be described as a public intellectual or even a political theologian who had reflectively internalized his American experience and wanted to discuss how it came to bear on Catholic self-understanding. In a series of articles, he explored how Catholics could cooperate with Protestants in working for the common good without promoting religious indifference. He also discussed in distinct articles a theology of the laity, the freedom of religious practice in society, and a theory of church and state.⁹

5. *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1949; first published 1845).

6. Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, On Religious Unity (January 6, 1928), https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos.html.

7. William R. Doran, 1.4 (1940), 395.

8. These articles form background for Lonergan’s classic work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992; first published 1957).

9. A defining moment for the American Catholic Church occurred during this decade. The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, which is known as the G.I. Bill, provided veterans of World War II with payments of tuition and living expenses for college. This allowed a whole generation of the children of Catholic immigrants to attend college and enter the workforce at a white-collar middle-class level.

The climax of this first period of *TS* was the publication of the encyclical letter of Pius XII, *Humani Generis*.¹⁰ This censorious letter addressed opinions that the Vatican thought undermined the foundations of Catholic doctrine. Main targets were the *nouvelle théologie*, which reflected earlier modernist insights, and a view of evolution that seemed to challenge creation theology and the unity of the race. The encyclical cast a pall over Catholic theology as several high-profile theologians were subsequently silenced. A couple of articles in *TS* reported on the encyclical. Gustave Weigel wrote a thorough introduction to the letter entitled “The Historical Background of the Encyclical ‘*Humani Generis*’” (12.2). In another article, he surveyed over 75 commentaries of European provenance on the encyclical; only one came from North America and it was written by a Protestant (12.4).

Catholic Theology in the 1940s

How might one characterize American Catholic theology in this early period? Four qualities set up a framework for tracing developments in the years to come.¹¹ The first regards the nature of the discipline of theology: Catholic theology is based on the authority of God as that is mediated through the church. The emphasis falls on deference to church teaching. The church does not reach the level of being an exclusive source for theology, but it acts as a controlling authority that regulated theological assertion in a fairly literal way.

Second, the role of authority made Catholic theology an ecclesiocentric discipline. Some cultural background supports this. The church was understood as a “perfect” society, which did not mean it was virtuous, but that it contained within itself all it needed to exist. And it was perceived to live in a hostile environment. The European church was assailed by scientism, laicism, and sociopolitical secularization. The American church existed in a thoroughly Protestant culture mixed with Enlightenment values. This resulted in the Catholic strategy of building a parallel Catholic social structure of schools and cultural organizations. Catholic theology had a defensive apologetic undertow. Internally, it was stifled by “Integrism.”¹² For the most part, theology was a clerical discipline, and seminaries provided the time necessary for

10. *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950), http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html (hereafter cited as *HG*).

11. The first decade of *TS* included over two hundred articles and addressed a variety of subjects other than doctrinal theology. These characterizations are stated forthrightly, without the nuance and qualification that close analysis would provide. These judgments, then, should be regarded as impressionistic descriptions that set up frameworks for comparison of the stages in the development of American Catholic theology.

12. Gustave Weigel defined Integrism this way: “Integrism or Integralism was a phenomenon consequent on the condemnation of Modernism. It manifested itself in the grouping of theologians and churchmen with the intention of combating any tendency or manifestation of Modernism, which was understood exaggeratedly as including anything that in the slightest way smacked of novelty.” “Gleanings from the Commentaries on *Humani Generis*,” *TS* 12 (1951): 530n17.

academic research. The principal writers for *TS* at its startup were professors from the seven English-speaking Jesuit faculties of theology in North America.¹³

Third, American Catholic theology was Eurocentric. American theologians for the most part were educated in Europe, many in Rome. Footnotes in early articles in *TS* refer extensively to European sources and experiences.¹⁴ No tradition of an American theology existed; the church in America was an immigrant community.

Fourth, American Catholic theology operated out of an underdeveloped critical consciousness. This descriptor needs to be handled with care; “critical consciousness” shifts in meaning and degree according to context. Despite the long discussion of the development of doctrine, one senses little awareness of how deeply human understanding reflects historical context. The development of the sociology of knowledge, including beliefs, was not widely disseminated or accepted. In an article on papal teaching on the study of Scripture in 1943, James Coleran noted that “the modern interpreter must make use of critical texts in the original language, and himself make use of modern methods of textual criticism” (5.1, 97). There was little sense of the implications of this injunction or the revolution in Catholic Scripture studies it would unleash in North America. The grid for compartmentalizing theology seemed permanent; supernaturalism was something to be guarded as representative of the metaphysical structure of Catholic self-understanding. Evolution was a theory that was hostile to Christianity and, at best, regarded with great caution. Faith assertions had some kind of universal objective meaning, either in the intention of the author in the sources or in the voice mediated by the church. This helped hold the church together as one. The need for hermeneutics, which essentially formed the basis for the *nouvelle théologie*, was held in suspicion. In many respects the theology of Lonergan, Murray, and Weigel transcended this description.

Theology Post-*Humani Generis*: 1952–1962

The first decade of the existence of *TS* ended with the repressive encyclical *Humani Generis* in August of 1950. The issues of 1951 gave considerable attention to the content of the papal letter. The next definable period of the journal stretches to the start of the Second Vatican Council. *Humani Generis* influenced the decade in a way analogous to the way the Vatican’s rejection of Modernism influenced the previous decade. It will be helpful, therefore, to set the context for this decade by noting some of the issues raised by *Humani Generis*.

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13. In 1940, the Jesuits supported five Pontifical Faculties of Theology. They were Woodstock College, in Woodstock, MD; Weston College, in Weston, MA; St. Mary’s College, in St. Mary’s, KS; West Baden College, in West Baden Springs, IN; and Alma College, in Alma, CA. Jesuits on the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary for the Archdiocese of Chicago also contributed to *TS* as did members of the faculty of Regis College in Toronto. I want to stress the “clerical” character of theology; it is hard to imagine today. It would be decades before the first article by a woman was published in *TS*.
 14. This partly resulted from a larger battle waged during the nineteenth century between those supporting an Americanization of the church in the USA and those consciously enforcing a Europeanization. By and large, immigrants brought their church with them.

Humani Generis saw large ideologies or sets of assumptions from outside the church infiltrating Catholic theology: for example, immanentism, pragmatism, existentialism, and historicism.¹⁵ Some theologians had been infected even when in good faith they sought to make the Gospel available to modern culture. But such irenicism and relativism undermine the teaching authority of the church and its scholastic synthesis, and the results scandalize the faithful.¹⁶ The encyclical criticized theologians who strip down dogmas to their essentials and treat substantive issues as changing forms.¹⁷ It asserted the strong role of the church's Magisterium: the church is the norm for interpreting Scripture. Scripture "interpreted by the purely human reason of exegetes" does not dictate to the church.¹⁸ The encyclical seemed to defend the idea of "the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation."¹⁹ Pius XII definitely worried about evolution.²⁰ The encyclical maintained the individuality of Adam, the unity of the human race descended from him, and an original sin "which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own."²¹

The encyclical placed the historical process of the development of doctrine under considerable pressure. Is there a key that can resolve the tension between the objective external authority of a permanent theological system and the dynamics of a community's faith lived in a changing history? *TS* carried no definitive breakthroughs during its second decade, but there were positive developments.

One of these was new attention given to Protestant theology. Gustave Weigel, who had written on Paul Tillich in *TS* 11.1 (1950), returned with an extensive analysis in 14.4 (1953). Two years later he chided some currents of Protestant theology for losing the metaphysical depth of the classical doctrines, and in 1956 he examined the doctrines underlying Protestant hymns and wondered whether the pastors would defend them. Dulles, too, studied Tillich, especially his view of biblical revelation (17.3), and in 1960 wrote an article on Protestant preaching and the prophetic mission. This article drew a stark contrast between Protestant self-understanding and the contents of Catholic doctrine. But, in the end, he concluded that there was no reason "to deny or minimize the fruitfulness of Protestant preaching" (21.4, 580).

John Courtney Murray continued his work in public theology with a five-article study of church and state in the writings of Leo XIII published from 1952 to 1954. Against a regime that would absorb the church, Leo laid out three principles: political authority is autonomous and from God; the church's authority is spiritual and derives from Christ; although spiritual authority is higher, there must be harmony between them. These principles were developed in the series.

15. *HG* 6–7.

16. *HG* 12–13.

17. *HG* 15–16.

18. *HG* 22.

19. *HG* 27.

20. *HG* 5.

21. *HG* 37.

In the mid-1950s, Murray became embroiled in controversy over how the Catholic Church related to civil government, which resulted in his being reduced to silence.²² In 1959 he returned to the pages of *TS* with an article on the morality of war and in 1962 on the structure of the problem of God.

Two other topics appear in the pages of *TS* in this period that are unrelated in the writing but will be drawn together in the future: the one is the persistent concern with the “supernatural” order, and the other is scientific cosmology. We saw the concern for the connection between the supernatural or grace and nature in the 1940s. In 1957 (18.1), P. de Letter went back to an analysis of Maurice de la Taille’s theory of sanctifying grace, incarnation, and the beatific vision published in 1928. In it de la Taille developed the phrase “created actuation by uncreated act.” When it is unpacked, this phrase represented a conception of supernatural grace as primarily a personal self-communication of God by formal causality (a presence without “informing” that is only possible by pure Act) to a spiritual person who can receive it; “created” or sanctifying grace was secondary to God’s self-presence.²³ This construct opened a way of overcoming the implied dualism of a supernatural order by reading it as a constant presence and invitation within creation. The other article, by Cyril Vollert, bore the title “Origin and Age of the Universe Appraised by Science” (18.2, 1957). No article in *TS* so explicitly dedicated to the scientific imagination had appeared before it. He noted the size and the age of the universe and broached the questions of its beginning and end from a scientific perspective. He did not discuss evolution, but the article symbolizes that theology could not keep the description of reality by science at bay much longer.

Theology at the Beginning of the Second Vatican Council

In the course of this decade *TS* was far from exclusively dedicated to systematic or doctrinal theology. It treated scriptural, historical, sacramental, pastoral, moral, and canonical topics. It contained occasional surveys in theological literature. In some ways it mirrored the Eisenhower years of few dramatic events but steady national development.

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22. Since the 1940s, Murray had critics of his views on church and state. In the course of events in 1954–55, Francis Connell and Joseph Clifford Fenton of Catholic University of America communicated directly with Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the Pro-Secretary of the Holy Office, their recommendation that the views of Murray should be “explicitly condemned” by the Holy See. The negotiations with Rome over the next year came to a point where Murray’s Jesuit superiors in Rome, who sympathized with his position, told him, in Murray’s terms, “to keep quiet for a while.” The story is told by Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Silencing of John Courtney Murray,” in *Cristianesimo Nella Storia: Saggi in Onore di Giuseppe Alberigo*, ed. by A. Melloni et al. (Bologna: Società Editrice Il Mulino, 1997), 657–702. Citation is from a letter of Murray to a Jesuit friend, p. 693.
23. This is the “same” as the conception developed by Karl Rahner in 1939 and published in *Theological Investigations*, 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 319–46. But Rahner notes his development “arose independently of de la Taille’s work,” which had escaped his attention. But, he noted, two people reaching the same conclusion independently cannot be totally wrong. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 1, 340n2.

Despite the fact that free imaginative Christian reflection on the world in the light of faith was held in check, some things were quietly simmering. One of these was a growing need for a new conception of the method of theology. Certain articles of this decade indicate a developing recognition of how deeply this need was felt.

In 1955 Vincent O'Keefe offered a fairly negative appraisal of Bultmann's existential method of theology (16.1). In 1957 George Tavard offered a more positive assessment of the potential of existentialism for theology: from the point of view of faith, phenomenological analysis of existence "can be a good instrument at the service of theology" (18.1, 16). In 1962 Joseph Cahill wrote an extensive review of John Macquarrie's *The Scope of Demythologizing* (23.1). He sorted out the strengths of Bultmann's and Macquarrie's existentialism from some obvious variances within Catholic understanding, but he also highlighted the congruence of the language of "encounter" with faith, as distinct from purely objective categories. The direction was expansive.

But Bernard Lonergan finally expressed clearly what was needed. In an article entitled "On the Method of Theology" (23.4), Frederick Crowe summarized the input of Lonergan at a workshop held at Regis College in July, 1962. The crisis as Lonergan described it was plain: Aristotelian and scholastic language have lost their intellectual grounding in a scientific age. Science has set up a different way of appreciating evidence and a new set of assumptions in which scholastic language does not fit. Added to this, "historical consciousness has invaded every field, to add on a sense of relativity (not relativism); tradition is not a norm in the way it was." Moreover, "phenomenology, existentialism, and personalism are cultivated in a way that leads directly to interiority and subjectivity, bypassing the theoretic element that has characterized theology" (23.4, 638). Lonergan was calling for new intellectually grounded methods in theology that included elements that *Humani Generis* found toxic. But Lonergan absorbed them into a broader intellectual framework that protected authentic faith. This would be one of the outcomes of Vatican II.

The Energy Released by Vatican II: 1962–1978

Angelo Roncalli was elected Pope in the fall of 1958 and took the name John XXIII. Three months later in early 1959 he announced that he would convene the Second Vatican Council. Today that council calls up several big ideas: updating of the church, ecumenism, openness to the world, revitalization of theology, and perhaps, most diffusely, change. The council had its most dramatic impact on the lives of people by the liturgical changes it initiated. Its influence on theology ran more deeply. But it took some time for shifts in fundamental values and orientation to become formulated as questions for reflection.

What follows is written from a later perspective looking back; it does not describe an intentionality back then that was looking forward. The articles in *TS* continued to be submitted as usual from all quarters. But passage of time offers a larger perspective on what was going on during this period. A host of issues had been raised after the Enlightenment and again in the Modernist period that had not been freely and openly debated; acts of authority had not resolved them. One can thus see a

modern consciousness, new for Catholicism, raising critical questions addressed to all theological topics in the wake of Vatican II, and at the same time stimulating new positive constructive directions for theology. After a review of the questioning and constructive currents of this period, I conclude this section by asking whether an indigenous American Catholic theology was beginning to take shape during this period.

Reviewing the theology stimulated by Vatican II shows by contrast several suppressed facets of modern intellectual culture beginning to become operative in the Catholic theology of this period. The first of these is historical consciousness. One of the purposes of the council was to bring the church “up to date” (*aggiornamento*) and, as John O’Malley wrote, this “cannot be understood apart from the problem of contemporary historical consciousness” (32.4, 576). This means that each moment of the history of doctrine is particular in relation to its context, implying that new construction is needed for the present time.²⁴ The second aspect of the thinking operative in this period is social consciousness. This has distinct applications to the way social and cultural belonging influences knowledge and to a limited but real degree control over our social existence. We see this in the rise of liberation theologies. A third dimension of modern consciousness was stated well by Peter Chirico: “Because of humanity’s historicity, the emergence of ontic pluralism in the various areas of human concern is to be expected with the passage of time” (39.1, 62). What is true across time is also true across cultures at any given time. North America generally has a strong practical sense of pluralism: not simple diversity, but a recognition of diversity being held together in a larger shared matrix. The fourth characteristic of modern consciousness can be called a scientific sensibility. This does not appear in the overt form that Vollert introduced to the readers of *TS* in 1957. But it is carried by the interest in Teilhard de Chardin that remained high during this period. He symbolized a scientific imagination—a combination of theologian, scientist, and evolutionist—and theologians wanted to know whether and how he managed it.

These characteristics of a modern consciousness seem antithetical to various aspects of the Catholic synthesis, and the openness of Vatican II, as much an event as a body of documents,²⁵ allowed these sensibilities and convictions to rise to the surface. They can be seen at work in most of the theology of *TS* during this period, as critical consciousness that raises new questions and as constructive consciousness inducing new methods and concerns in theology.

24. As O’Malley put it, “Each word, document, event is historically and culturally conditioned, radically individualized, and understandable as history only insofar as it is unique and the result of man’s more or less free action and decision.” “Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II’s *Aggiornamento*” (32.4, 596).

25. One could plausibly argue that open reporting of conflict within the council on issues of doctrine may have relativized a naïve view of church authority more than any one of the conciliar texts.

Critical consciousness

The probing and questioning character of the theology during this period reaches across the spectrum of focused fields. One has to begin with the church because it was the subject matter of the council, but new questions were also being asked about the nature of doctrine and theology. Regarding the church, Aelred Cody asked about the foundation of the church and whether biblical criticism allowed one to say that Jesus intentionally founded the church (34.1). Bernard F. Donahue analyzed the church in sociological and political categories as an earthly institution (33.2). William Scott opened up a new social existential view of tradition from Maurice Blondel as grounded in the community praxis of faith: so much deeper than comparing the words of doctrines from different contexts (27.3). Michael Fahey probed the implications of a constantly changing church (35.3, 38.4). This theological discussion represents a church that was undergoing a transition, and it was contentious. Joseph Bracken felt compelled to offer a theory of how and why one could dissent from authority (31.3), and John Kippley retorted that dissent on basic moral issues was not a form of deeper loyalty but a sellout to a secular culture (32.1).

In addition to the Catholic Church reflecting on itself within a new context of openness to “the world,” the official joining of the ecumenical movement entailed another new and different perspective on everything ecclesial. The immigrant church in a Protestant world had shared a minority consciousness; President Kennedy’s election symbolized it was coming of age. The council called for openness to Protestants formerly shunned and to a world of pluralism (Fries, 28.1). “Dialoguing is going on everywhere, within and without the Catholic Church, within and without Christianity, within and without the ranks of believers” (Killian, 30.1, 61). In one number of *TS* in September, 1967 four articles sympathetically analyzed the work of Martin Luther, something that went on during the whole period. Positive intentions are one thing, but Avery Dulles, measuring Catholic openness to Protestant churches against Catholic teaching, showed the many complications involved in ecumenism in “The Church, the Churches, and the Catholic Church” (33.2). This interest too spanned the period.

The area of doctrine was another topic that the council threw into sharp relief. Dogmas usually pointed to immutable truths in irreformable propositions. Gradual appropriation of the council made many appear dated, reformable, and an obstacle to ecumenical communion (Dulles, 29.3). Here the church had resources to handle this issue; the theology of the development of doctrine had been a major issue for over a century. In 1966 Anselm Atkins, with great clarity, brought the process philosophy of Whitehead to bear on this issue (27.4). And some years later Paul Misner showed how the question of doctrine’s development opens up the epistemology, structure, and function of dogmatic/doctrinal statements as both historically conditioned and salutary (34.4). By contrast, in 1966, Leslie Dewart published a work entitled *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age*,²⁶ which appeared to recommend a leap out of

26. Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

traditional theology directly into a world without metaphysics. The key word was “dehellenization.” The book set off a polarizing discussion and earned a rebuke from both Bernard Lonergan and Jaroslav Pelikan (28.2). At the end of this period the titles of two articles on the church summarized a growing consensus: “A Changing Ecclesiology in a Changing Church” (Fahey, 38.4) and “Dynamics of Change in the Church’s Self-Understanding” (Chirico, 39.1). In both articles, change in the church was assumed as a given. Historicity was now taken for granted, and the meaning of traditional dogma/doctrine was a matter of hermeneutics (Ommen, 35.4).

A third and very creative topic unleashed by Vatican II concerned the discipline of theology itself. During this period, one can almost witness a gradual transition from reflection based on church authority to a critical discipline. John Coleman, a sociologist of religion, contributed to this discussion with a nuanced view of the various meanings of secularization as it characterized theology’s new context (39.4). Various appeals were made for linking theology with “experience,” which sometimes meant the experience provided by faith in community (Bozzo, 31.3), sometimes a more generalized but examined “experience of transcendence” (Hazelton, 33.4), and sometimes a critical theory of personal knowledge (Apczynski, 40.1). Theology had definitely taken a turn to the subject. David Tracy advocated a hermeneutical method of critical correlation as a broad framework for theology.²⁷ The year before Tracy’s book, Raymond Devettere advocated a recognition and promotion of pluralism in theology (35.3). He made a thorough and convincing case, appealing to science along the way, that real progress and real diversity in theology were possible while maintaining the unity of faith.

Other doctrines came under critical review in the context of the light of a new critical consciousness. A whole series of articles addressed the question of revelation and gradually shifted the framework for understanding it toward the human person who receives it, experience, encounter, and divine presence to a community.²⁸ The counterpart of revelation is faith to which an entire issue of *TS* was dedicated in 1978 (39.4). Another doctrine that comes under questioning in this period is original sin. Formally in play in the encyclical *Humani Generis*, it was critically discussed in successive issues in 1968 by Patrick Burke (29.1) and James Connor (29.2). Finally, Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* had a good reception among American Catholic theologians.²⁹ This can be appreciated in the article of William Frost, “A Decade of Hope Theology in North America” (39.1).

27. Tracy did not develop this in the pages of *TS* but in his book, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975). It was reported, however, by Avery Dulles in his extended review of this work in *TS*, 37.2.

28. Beginning with P. de Letter (24.3), articles by Avery Dulles (25.1, 27.1), Joseph Smith (27.3), Gregory Baum (28.1), and Thomas O’Meara (36.3) stand out as efforts to accommodate a growing Catholic consensus that the very sources of theology must include grounding within the human person.

29. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

Constructive consciousness

Directing attention now to the constructive side of the new consciousness stimulated by Vatican II, even though a hard distinction between questioning and construction is not appropriate, some genuinely new insights and conceptions made their appearance in Catholic theology during this period. Four of them seem to be permanent acquisitions.

The first is a new ecumenical consciousness that runs below the many actual bilateral dialogues between Catholic theologians and those of other Christian churches. It consists of a new imaginative framework that looks upon all Christians as forming one church. This was not shared across the board; differences obtain and need attention. But among the many articles of this period some exhibited a certain impatience with institutional inertia. The point, however, is not the frustration but the new fundamental sensibility of being one with all Christians that is almost entirely new for Catholic theology.³⁰

The second new consciousness in American Catholic theological consciousness may be called liberationist. It was first articulated in *TS* by Gustavo Gutiérrez in his article "Notes for a Liberation Theology" in 1970 (31.2).³¹ Something more was going on here than the application of Catholic social doctrine to situations of extreme systemic poverty. The fundamental conception of "salvation" was being revised in terms that include human emancipation from various forms of bondage, in this case social entrapment. This implied a new way of thinking, a new expectation guiding the logic of Christian faith. Gutiérrez's article appeared two years after the assassination of Martin Luther King and just after the publication of James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970).³² Black liberation theology was introduced to the pages of *TS* by John Carey with an article in 1972 that reviewed and criticized black theology, and then acknowledged the racism of the white churches and the penetrating relevance of this new movement (33.4). In 1974 he hoped that black theology would call into question some assumptions of white theology and help push us toward a community beyond racism (35.3). These theologies of liberation were offering a new consciousness and framework in which social relevance is intrinsic to a strictly theological imagination.

A third new consciousness consists of a liberated imagination of Catholic women theologians and Scripture scholars. This movement began in the 1960s with the works of Mary Daly and took time to become registered in the pages of *TS*. A quantum leap occurred in December, 1975, when seven recognized women scholars, along with two men, brought the role of women in society, church, and the discipline of theology to the fore (36.4). The authors were Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Margaret Farley, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Carroll, Raymond

30. See, for example, J. Robert Nelson, "Toward an Ecumenical Ecclesiology" (31.4) and P. de Letter, "Our Unity in Faith" (38.3).

31. This was followed up by other articles during this period. Alfred Hennelly introduced the theology of Juan Luis Segundo in 1977 (38.1), and T. Howland Sanks and Brian Smith wrote about liberation ecclesiology and praxis in Chile in the same issue.

32. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury, 1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970).

Brown, George Tavard, Mary Aquin O'Neill, and Anne Patrick. The articles covered a whole range of directly relevant issues: anthropology, social status, relationships, work, ministry, language, values, and a radically critical consciousness. The issue displayed a level of competence that could not be disputed. It was a landmark for American Catholic theology. Interestingly, in the June number of the same volume Peter Hünemann of Germany had an article recommending the female diaconate (36.2).

Finally, process theology began to inform American Catholic theology during this period. Anselm Atkin's use of Whitehead to help understand the development of doctrine was noted earlier; later Anthony Kelly turned to Schubert Ogden, Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb and others to help talk about the Trinity (31.3). Norman Pittenger responded to Kelly (32.2) and also wrote about Whitehead's concept of God as pure unbounded love and our companion in suffering in "Whitehead and 'Catholicism'" (32.4). But, once again, the point here does not lie in concepts but in metaphysical appropriation of historicity: the nature of reality itself is movement and incremental change, not changelessness. In sum, during this period a new historical, social, pluralist, and implicitly scientific consciousness generated some altogether new movements within American Catholic theology.

Towards an American Catholic Theology?

Avery Dulles, in reviewing David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* in 1976, used the category of an American Catholic theology (37.2, 304). By that term he meant a theology generated in America, attentive to its history and culture, and recognized by others outside that context as characteristic, distinctive, and valuable. It would deal with issues that are lively on this continent and be ecumenical, referring to other Christian theologians as informants and sources. Dulles thought that such a theology did not exist, but that Tracy's book was an example of what an American Catholic theology might look like. In a conclusion to this period of *TS* during and following Vatican II, I ask whether it bears witness to the beginning of the formation of a North American theology, in a way analogous to Latin America's Catholic theology becoming liberationist. In response to that question, the articles that have been noted give rise to a preliminary description of some of the components of such a theology. Drawing this out sets up a hypothesis that will function as a heuristic hermeneutical lens for what follows.

The first witness to an American Catholic theology from the pages of *TS* is John Courtney Murray. He had a broad historical consciousness that could cite knowingly Marsilius of Padua (fourteenth century), Richard Hooker of England (sixteenth century), and Leo XIII (nineteenth century). He knew the history of church and state in Europe, but he shared a distinctively American experience. His last statements in *TS* were on religious freedom in 1964 (25.4) and the relation of church and state in 1966 (27.4). John Coleman treats Murray, along with Orestes Brownson and John Ryan, as a definer of vision and praxis in American theology (37.1). Coleman, Robin Lovin, Bryan Hehir, and David Hollenbach discuss the legacy of Murray as an American Catholic public theologian in 40.4.

Other “beginnings” of what will lead to an American Catholic theology can be noted in this period. Many Catholic theologians easily appropriated Latin American liberationists because of its Catholic references and rhetoric, but John Carey introduced *TS* readers to black liberation theology and America’s problem with racism. This has to be intrinsic to American theology. Concomitantly, feminist liberation theology, which appealed to American roots, was quickly embraced by Catholic women across the spectrum of theological disciplines. These theological perspectives mark areas in which a distinctively American Catholic perspective would grow.

Two other trends of this period introduced a new dimension into Catholic theology: ecumenism, and students of theology, now both clerical and lay, gaining their degrees in Protestant faculties of theology.³³ This helped soften the hard boundaries between Protestant and Catholic thinking and broadened a Catholic theological imagination and method. This was manifested in an open display of collegiality between David Tracy, Landon Gilkey, and Schubert Ogden in their collected responses to Peter Berger’s charge of reductionism in 1978 (39.3). More and more American Catholic theologians would read Protestant theology for constructive rather than apologetic reasons, thus allowing American pluralist culture into their theological reasoning.

Finally, *TS* bears witness to a constructive interest in other faith traditions during this period. In 1966 John Moffitt wrote “A Christian Approach to Hindu Beliefs” (27.1) and followed it up in 1969 (30.2) and 1977 (38.2). Eugene Borowitz reported on Jewish theology in 1970 (31.3), and Daniel O’Hanlon linked Zen and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola in 1978 (39.4). These articles together do not constitute a tradition, but this perspective too would take off during the next forty years of *TS*’s existence. In all, we have a profile, some new ideas about method in theology, and a style that would grow towards the development of an American Catholic theology.

Growing Confidence in Critical Method: 1978–2013

The dates correspond with the tenure of two popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both of whom were interested in the development of theology across the world. But it is not easy to define their influence on the articles written in *TS* over this span of thirty-five years. If anything, the development moves away from complete dependence on pure authority toward critical, methodical construction. When it began, *TS* reflected Catholic theology as a clerical discipline; by the end of the 1970s that was no longer the case; and the range of its articles was eclectic and far-reaching. The order of topics reprised from the previous section hides their diversity. Except for the occasional thematic issue, there was usually something for everyone.

What follows imposes an order on a chaotic range of topics and is highly interpretive and synthetic. One notices new initiatives and less the reactions against them and business as usual. I proceed by generalization and specific witnesses to represent what is going on. In each case I add an interpretive comment to characterize a contribution

33. It goes without saying that Catholic theologians holding positions in Protestant faculties and departments of theology lent weight to this development.

or mark an advance along the way. The section concludes with a penultimate assessment of the development of an American Catholic theology.

Church and Ecumenism

The Second Vatican Council was called to update the church, to examine its relationship with other churches, and in so doing it reconceived its relationship to the world. The great energy released into the theological areas of ecclesiology and ecumenism waned somewhat during this period. Articles dealt with the relation between the center and the periphery, the local church and the whole church (43.2), the structure of a systematic theology of the church (63.1), a theology of ministry (61.3), and several articles by Dennis Doyle on communion ecclesiology. Toward the end of this period two articles looked back at Vatican II to assess its significance. In one, John O'Malley argued that the significance of the council lay especially in ratifying change in the church and the significance of local churches (67.1). In the other, Thomas Hughson described the event as a "new Pentecost" of the divine Spirit in the church (69.1).

TS paid high tribute to ecumenism by publishing the common statement of the bilateral dialogue between Lutheran and Catholic theologians on the teaching authority and infallibility of the church in 1979 (40.1). In some ways it marked the peak of ecumenism in the journal. Robert Kress summarized the situation in 1983: a broad swath of the faithful did not see any reason for division among the churches, and thus he felt that, quoting Karl Rahner, the ecumenical question now had to be "directed to the officeholders of the churches" (44.3, 409). Kress called for a new ecumenical hermeneutic of the traditions that acknowledged differences but held them together in a larger and deeper common faith. This period also carried a sustained debate over whether the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* 8, that the church of Christ "subsists in" the Catholic Church, implicitly meant that this status was shared with other churches.³⁴

Theology as a Discipline

No formal consensus marked the discussion of the discipline(s) called fundamental, systematic, constructive, or apologetic theology over this period of three decades. Over forty articles dealt with historicity, postmodernism, globalization, multiculturalism, experience, revelation, tradition, change, doctrinal development, pluralism, authority, and process thought. They were not all saying the same thing. Historicity, the bond of all thinking to particular time, place, and culture, identifies a problem behind all of this reflection. And a common solution lay in various ways of integrating historical conditioning into the manner of thinking theologically. David Tracy (50.3), Jack Bonsor (55.2), and especially Thomas Guarino (54.1; 57.4; 62.4) work within the broad framework of European and American thought, Protestant and Catholic, and negotiate a standpoint between a pluralist historicist context and Christian revelation.

34. *Lumen Gentium* 8, (November 21, 1964), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

Students of Bernard Lonergan, led by Robert Doran, appeared to form a school that addressed these basic issues. Doran thoroughly discussed the demands on systematic theology in the face of history in four articles (58.1; 59.4; 60.4; 67.4). Process theology too had its spokespersons, preeminently in Joseph Bracken (59.4), but not without public resistance. In 1981 David Burrell wrote “Does Process Theology Rest on a Mistake?” (42.4) to which Philip Devenish responded (43.3), and in 1986 J. J. Mueller was asking why process theology was not taking hold in the American Catholic community (47.3).

Within this broad area of reflection on the discipline itself, certain specific topics help delineate a transition within the discipline. “Experience” is such a category. George Schner subjected “The Appeal to Experience” (53.1) to a critical analysis that showed how it rarely functions in a specific argument and only has meaning in a sophisticated broad sense of a turn to a focus on subjectivity. And so it was that revelation received considerable attention in this period. Michael Cook looked at revelation as a metaphoric process (47.3); Franz Jozef van Beeck wrote that revelation is better conceived as God’s self-communication than as an intervention into history (52.2); and James Pambrun discussed “Revelation and Interiority” (67.2).

Four articles during this period subject “tradition” to a thorough examination. John Thiel proposed a critique of organic views of tradition and a constructive postmodern historicist view that is attentive to actual history (56.4). He followed that with “The Analogy of Tradition” ten years later in 2005; it showed tradition’s place in theological reasoning (66.2). The following year Thomas Guarino examined tradition and doctrinal development demonstrating how real development (read “change”) can still faithfully bear the meaning of revelation (67.1). Joseph Mueller provided a neat companion to these analyses with an article that pointed out how essential “forgetting” is the actual process of tradition (70.4).

Two other topics familiar to Catholic theology did not receive the intense scrutiny of former times: development of doctrine and authority.³⁵ This may be explained by the fact that much of that discussion was folded into a larger and deeper framework of revelation and historicity. The understandings of history, revelation, tradition, and method generate an intrinsically historical sense of doctrine and a less heteronomous view of authority.

For all the diversity during this period, one can discern several common constructive principles that have been internalized. I propose two at this juncture with more following below. First, American Catholic theology became a critical discipline: it certainly cannot be characterized as an explanation of the views of the Magisterium. Teaching authority became one element in a much larger and more complex self-understanding of the discipline. Second, revelation offered the most telling place where this was felt, a topic which Vatican II introduced. Revelation was reconceived in terms of personal communication that does not exist without reception: subject to subject, epiphanic manifestation, always tied to history, but able to encompass a whole life. This turn to the subject, which now had to be understood in a historicist context, altered the basic conception of theology. It had become an open, seeking discipline, humbler and less apodictic, and thus deeper and more interesting.

35. An obvious exception to this is Daniel Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine” (62.2).

Liberation Theology

During this period liberation theology seeped into the sinews of American Catholic theology. Charles Murphy recalled the doctrinal foundation from the Synod of Bishops in 1971 that action for justice is constitutive of the preaching of the Gospel (44.2). Two articles drawing upon liberation theology addressed to mainstream American theology—by Bernard Verkamp (49.1) and Peter Phan (61.1)—insisted on the use of a social imagination and a commitment to action on behalf of the marginalized in the public sphere. At the same time the appropriation of liberation theology into an American context resulted in differentiation according to cultural communities and issues.

The liberation theology of Latin America continued to inspire American theologians broadly.³⁶ In 2004, however, US Latino/a theologians wrote the whole summer number (65.2). The authors were Roberto Goizueta, Allan Figueroa Deck, Gary Riebe-Estrella, Jeanette Rodriguez, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Ana María Pineda. This display of theological expertise showed that what began as Latin American theology was appropriated in the USA by Latino/a theologians as their own contextual theology. With it they addressed both their own communities and the larger theological community.

The LGBTQ community did not produce a liberation theology in the pages of *TS*, but in 2003 James Keenan wrote “The Open Debate: Moral Theology and the Lives of Gay and Lesbian Persons” in which he concluded, “Like other groups of people who have been oppressed by, among others, the Church, they help us to see that by silencing and marginalizing them, we do harm to them, ourselves, the Church, and the gospel” (64.1, 150).

Around 2010, liberation theology found another a new form. The social commitment intrinsic to liberation theology spontaneously drew the grave social issues of migrants and refugees into its sphere. The articles of Gioacchino Campese on “The Irruption of Migrants” (73.1) and Joshua Ralston’s “Toward a Political Theology of Refugee Resettlement” (73.2) demonstrated the wide scope of liberationist commitment.

Turning now to feminist liberation theology, in 1982 Anne Carr asked, “Is a Christian Feminist Theology Possible?” (43.2) before answering it with her own work.³⁷ The question continued to be asked, however, because it was gradually becoming clear that the Catholic Church lacked something essential in its understanding of human nature.³⁸ In 1999 Sally Vance-Trembath used John Paul II’s

36. Patrick Byrne and Stephen Pope explained from a moral perspective the partiality of a preferential option for the poor in articles that correlated well with the message from the 1971 Synod of Bishops (54.2); James Nickoloff analyzed the church of the poor in the ecclesiology of Gustavo Gutiérrez (54.3); and Margaret Pfeil (72.1) showed the relevance of the witness of Óscar Romero to a commitment to the poor in the United States.

37. Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

38. See Mary Aquin O’Neill (56.4); Donna Teevan, too, drawing on Protestant analyses of the human subject, saw the implications of a deficient Catholic anthropology underlying resistance to women (64.3). Gloria Schaab also wrote on “Feminist Theological Method” in 2001 (62.2).

conversion to acceptance of other Christian churches as an analogy for a possible acceptance of women into the sphere of full Christian discipleship (60.1). The analogy itself said something basic was wrong. In 2005 Edward Vacek criticized the Vatican's view of women as deficient in its failure to allow "full participation" of women in church and society (66.1).³⁹

Acceptance of women as full members of the church entails the question of formal ordained leadership. The question of women's ordination had been asked for over twenty years before Dennis Michael Ferrara took it up in 1994 (55.4), giving rise to an exchange between him and Sara Butler the following year (56.2). That conversation did not die there.⁴⁰

Black liberation theology was marginally represented in *TS* during the previous period but grew exponentially in this one. In the year 2000, a whole issue was written by African American Catholic theologians and ethicists and commented on by James Cone (61.4). The authors were Diana Hayes, Shawn Copeland, Cyprian Davis, Jamie Phelps, and Bryan Massingale. Two years after this *tour de force*, Mary Doak challenged mainline American Catholic theology using Cornel West's thought as a lever: "Instead of countercultural, liberationist, postmodern, or public theologies, we need to combine these insights in the development of a more integral theology, an approach in which the perspectives of Black theologians must be central" (63.1, 87). This theme continued to simmer in black theology: a deeply systemic social and cultural evil infects America, and it had to be addressed. In 2004 Randall Bush used Rosa Parks as a reminder that theology should not lose its prophetic edge on questions of race (65.4). And in his article on black suffering in 2006 (67.2), Christopher Pramuk anticipated James Cone's using the lynching tree as a metaphor that challenges white Christian culture and theology to conversion.⁴¹

In its many forms liberation theology became an integral part of American Catholic theology during this period, but this did not convert to American Catholic theology becoming liberationist. That would require consistent and spontaneous attention to the social effects of Christian self-understanding. For many reasons neither the church's current leaders nor its theologians as a group have followed through on the initiative of the pastoral letters of the US Bishops in the 1980s in keeping public social issues in the foreground of theology.

39. In other articles, Cynthia Crysdale offered the perspective of Lonergan on feminist theology (53.2), while Michelle Gonzalez presented a conversation between Hans Urs von Balthasar and feminist theology on anthropology, methodology, and Christology that generated useful clarifications on both sides (65.3).

40. John Hilary Martin discussed the ordination of women in the medieval period (48.2), giving the issue historical depth. Phyllis Zagano raised "The Question of Governance and Ministry for Women" in the church especially with respect to the ordination of women in 2007 (68.2). In a 2011 reprise (72.4), she reinforced the formal practice of the ordination of women to the diaconate with an argument from tradition.

41. In 2009, Paul Kollman showed that racism was so pervasive that it spilled over into missionary activity (70.4).

Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith consciousness, dialogue and reflection took off during this period. Distinguishing three dimensions of the expansion helps to understand the complexity of what was going on: dialogue, constructive comparison, and critical questioning.

A first level of interest can be called straightforwardly interfaith dialogue. It was illustrated by the article of Eugene Borowitz (44.2) which consisted in a discussion of subjects or events by people representing different religious points of view. Sharing aims at gaining more expansive mutual understanding. But Jeannine Hill Fletcher warned that, deep down, such cross-cultural religious communication was actually very difficult and could only be accomplished by degrees within a context of openness and wonder at the incomprehensibility of transcendence (68.3).⁴² And James Redington distinguished an “interior dialogue” that accompanies interfaith discussion of beliefs.⁴³ It consists of persons being engaged and affected by the beliefs of others in a way that forces an inner assessment and appropriation in their own belief systems. This provides a clue to why two distinct subdisciplines developed over this period: comparative theology and theology of religions.

Comparative theology arose during this period. Francis X. Clooney, often referred to as a founder of comparative theology, contributed at least four articles to *TS* over this period, one in which he magisterially surveyed strong comparativist energy between 1989 and 1995.⁴⁴ His articles introduced readers to South Indian religious beliefs with the aim of enriching current Christian theological understanding of itself and the world. He posited comparative theology in contrast to an effort to locate other religions within the framework of a comprehensive Christian worldview. In line with Clooney, James Fredericks defined and exemplified comparative theology.⁴⁵ Theology consists of interpreting Christian tradition, he argued, and comparative theology does this by placing Christian texts in conversation with the texts of other faith traditions, thereby illuminating Christian tradition by comparison and contrast. In this article God’s incomprehensibility in Aquinas was compared with Nagarjuna’s concept of emptiness. As a sign of the creative importance of comparative theology, the summer issue of *TS* in 2003 was written by comparativists representing many faith traditions: Clooney, Fredericks, Ruben Habito, Qamar-ul Huda, Ruth Langer, John Makransky, and Gerald O’Collins (64.2).

Theology of religions asks critical questions. Fredericks began his article entitled “Incomprehensibility” this way: “Comparative theology is a better way of responding creatively and responsibly to the fact of religious pluralism than a theology of religions” (56.3, 506). This sounds rather like saying historical theology is better than systematic theology. The questions raised in “interior dialogue” take many forms and some require

42. It is also “dangerous” from the perspective of church leaders. Terrence Tilley offers a critical reading of a document on interfaith dialogue by the International Theological Commission of the Vatican in 60.2.

43. “The Hindu–Christian Dialogue and the Interior Dialogue” (44.4).

44. These are found at 48.4; 51.2; 56.3; and 64.2.

45. “The Incomprehensibility of God: A Buddhist Reading of Aquinas” (56.3).

assessment, beyond meaning, of representational adequacy, status, and truth. One may look at a Christian theology of religion as various efforts to interpret and situate the tradition of Christian claims in a world of many vital religious traditions. The subject matter yields contention and pluralism, and this was reflected in *TS*. For example, Peter Phan developed a theology of religious pluralism by including the testimonies of those with multiple religious belonging (58.4), and Terrence Merrigan affirmed, “Indeed, in my judgment, the pluralists’ understanding of religious knowledge cannot be ultimately integrated into any recognizable version of orthodox Christianity” (58.4, 706). On the one hand, Joseph DiNoia embraced historical consciousness and wanted to shift theology out of a comprehensive philosophical framework into a historical context of realist confession on the basis of revelation (49.3). And Ilia Delio used the Trinity as a lens for interpreting religious diversity (70.4). On the other hand, Paul Crowley accepted Karl Rahner’s conception of the human subject as a basis for interfaith dialogue but had a critical problem with his christocentrism (71.3).⁴⁶

A Christian theology of religions can have practical consequences: for example, should Christians look upon Jews as an object of missionary activity? Gavin D’Costa argued that the trajectory of magisterial teaching from Vatican II to the present day supports mission, but he advised prudential judgment regarding practice (73.3, 590). Edward Kessler, from a Jewish perspective, maintained that Jews and Christians share the same revelational covenant with God in different ways that are both intended by God (73.3, 416). Elizabeth Groppe held that the Catholic Church should revise Vatican II’s typological account of biblical Israel as a prefiguration of the church with an eschatological theology of Christians and Jews as a broken people who remain covenant partners in pilgrimage (72.3). And John Pawlikowski thought that Vatican II Catholicism does not unambiguously support a mission to the Jews (73.3). In short, the theology of religions is a contentious discipline with practical implications.

Theology and Science

TS bears narrative witness to an awakening of theology to the possibilities opened up by a dialogue with science. The articles in this period show three fairly distinct phases of a growing interest: discovering a potentially positive exchange, facing critical theoretical problems, and turning to the practical issue of ecology.

We begin by noticing a certain détente from the side of theology and then a discovery of how science may contribute to theological understanding. In 1984 Terrence Tilley commented on three books on science and religion by Thomas Torrance, John Haught, and Helmut Peukert (45.4).⁴⁷ During the early 1990s three articles described

46. George Karuvelil claimed that one can finesse the particularity of Christian faith in a pluralist setting by an existential interpretation of faith as a commitment to Christ that acknowledges a pluralistic horizon of mediations (73.1).

47. Generally speaking fewer theologians have advanced expertise in the natural sciences than in other fields that influence theological reflection. Science is thus appropriated in various degrees of nuance. For example, John Honner (46.3), who taught courses on the interface between theology and physics, developed on an abstract level an analogy between terms used by Karl Rahner to express “unity-in-difference” and terms used by Niels Bohr.

a new positive dialogical relationship that theology or religion and science might develop so long as each remained within its autonomous sphere of thinking.⁴⁸ Against a backdrop of a certain fear of science, these articles displayed hope for a rich new chapter of the relationship. At certain points, Pope John Paul II was cited in the discussion: “Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutism” (Mooney, 52.2, 289).

The conversation between science and Christian theology moved to a new level when evolution was placed on the table and questions were raised about the status of humanity, personal identity, and divine providence. Christopher Mooney (51.2) wrote on evolution and providence relying on Teilhard de Chardin for whom God’s providence works through human agents and thus through the human species. Edward Oakes added a note on final causality to Mooney’s discussion. Inspired by Michael Polanyi, Oakes felt that “We are driven to posit teleology because of the inadequacies of asserting that a certain outcome occurs by chance” (53.3, 541). Elizabeth Johnson took up the issue with “Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance” (57.1).⁴⁹ And ten years later in 2006 Patrick Byrne drew on Bernard Lonergan “to reconcile the affirmations of divine purpose and the randomness of the evolving world” (67.3, 653). The appeal to science sometimes complexified rather than resolved major issues.

In 2010 (71.4), Matthew Ashley authored “Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination” that clarified some methodological issues and can be seen as a bridge to the next phase of the science/theology discussion. He questioned the tendency to use the big “universe story” as a normative metanarrative when in fact it is filled with tacit assumptions abstracted from the details of scientific discovery. For example, the scientific story of origins is sometimes contrasted one-to-one with the creation story of Genesis, without mining the rich contextual meanings of the latter. The big stories of the universe and of Christianity, as reflected in Scripture, for example, are drawn from a mosaic of smaller and more intricate stories on both sides. The results of science communicate more forcefully through concrete narratives like those found in Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*, which helped introduce the issues of ecology.

The urgency of environmental problems, their simultaneously theological and moral dimensions, and their relevance to the lives of all is reflected in *TS*. Denis Edwards, in “The Ecological Significance of God-Language” (60.4), showed how the symbols of Wisdom and Logos “have always been linked to creation theology and are open to ecological theology” (708). Jame Schaefer, too, wrote in pursuit of “a religiously motivated rationale for intrinsic-instrumental valuing of the physical world’s constituents for themselves, their relationships to one another, and their common good

48. Michael Buckley, “Religion and Science: Paul Davies and John Paul II” (51.2); Christopher Mooney, “Theology and Science: A New Commitment to Dialogue” (52.2); John Wright, “Theology, Philosophy, and the Natural Sciences” (52.4).

49. Joseph Bracken wrote a response to Johnson (57.4) essentially agreeing with her position but recommending Whiteheadian over Thomistic language and thus offering a case study for comparison.

that can be relevant, meaningful, and helpful for responding to ecological degradation” (783).⁵⁰ Karl Rahner also provided inspiration for taking our earthly existence with ultimate seriousness.⁵¹

These three phases of the relationship of theology to science show a transition from defensiveness in relation to science to a more confident understanding of science’s own sources and methods. The technical theology–science dialogue has been carried on by a specialized group, but these writings show that it has the potential to influence theological construction broadly and deeply.

Doctrinal Loci

Many articles over this thirty-five-year period addressed the basic doctrinal commitments of the church. In each case a specific issue was at stake, too many to review in detail. Articles fell within the domain of God, creation, and providence. Christology dominated the topics, with articles focused on Jesus of Nazareth, his resurrection, and theories of salvation. Several articles dealt with the Spirit of God, Trinity, and eschatology. A particular method of theology or a framework like interfaith dialogue often governed the development of an article. For example, liberation theologians interpreted the role of Jesus Christ in a way that made him particularly but not exclusively relevant to a distinct situation and audience. Thus, the formal perspectives that have just been outlined defined distinct ways of understanding traditional beliefs, making Catholic theology a decidedly pluralistic discipline. Rather than try to represent the confluence of doctrines, approaches, and theses of authors, what follows are articles selected to show the rich probing character of the doctrinal theology of this period.

In an article on “creation out of nothing,” Brian Robinette (72.3) exhibited the depth and all-embracing character of this doctrine relative to every area of the Christian vision, from existence and suffering to grace, resurrection, and eternal life. John Galvin (55.2) analyzed a turning point and “paradigm shift” in Christology as historical consciousness turned attention from the abstract humanity of Christ to the Jesus of history. The summer issue of 2009 (70.2) was dedicated to the particularity of Jesus’s Galilee as a gateway to Christology. Several articles in this period also dealt with Jesus’s resurrection. Robert Daly (68.1) underlined the problems with Anselmian conceptions of atonement, and Lisa Sowle Cahill (68.2), in dialogue with Daly, found some positive aspects to the idea. Wolfgang Vondey (70.1) took up the function of God as Spirit in a post-Newtonian physical universe. Catherine LaCugna’s large contribution to trinitarian theology was summed up by Elizabeth Groppe (63.4). Finally, Peter Phan (55.3) showed how various aspects of the doctrines of the last things have entered a new phase of interpretation. John

50. Jane Schaefer, “Valuing Earth Intrinsically and Instrumentally: A Theological Framework for Environmental Ethics” (66.4). See also Schaefer, “Appreciating the Beauty of Earth” (66.1).

51. Hyun-Chul Cho (70.3) wrote on the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of ecological principles. He used Karl Rahner’s Christology to show “nature’s intrinsic value and the inherent link between humanity and nature” (622).

R. Sachs (52.2; 54.4) contributed two basic articles on eschatology. In sum, these notations indicate how, over the course of time, doctrines were being reinterpreted when confronted by new questions, analyzed by new methods, and seen through new lenses. Did this produce a new American Catholic theology?

Americanist Themes

I conclude this section with an analysis of Americanist themes reflected in this period but without answering the question, “Is there an American Catholic theology?” There was some conscious effort paid to the project of inculturating Catholic theology into American culture. The “Murray Group,” for example, was dedicated to that endeavor. Gustavo Gutiérrez was shown to be analogous to Walter Rauschenbusch (Sanks, 41.4), and church mission in the theology of the Social Gospel was seen as relevant to the present situation (Haight, 49.3). Some attention was given to the history of the American Catholic church that provided context.⁵² Process theology and feminist theology were both American.

In 1982 *TS* began a series of articles in philosophical theology by the John Courtney Murray Group. The central theme of the series is the development of an inculturated theology for the U.S. through the retrieval, in a theological context, of classical North American philosophy. For example, William Spohn turned to H. Richard Niebuhr and Jonathan Edwards for inspiration on an affective approach to Christian discernment (44.1). In separate moves, Michael Buckley addressed atheism in American culture (50.3, preceded by 39.4, 40.4) and Belden Lane turned to Jonathan Edwards’s theology of God (65.1).

Two formal attempts honed in on an American theology. Joseph Hughson asked whether the Catholic Church would become a public advocate for racial, social, and environmental justice. On the basis of sociological analysis of Catholic attitudes, he responded that that such a hope was not unambiguously warranted (62.4). And Peter Phan offered an analysis of what the American context demanded of Catholic theology: inculturation into a new non-European cultural mix, attention to religious pluralism, and engagement with the poor and marginalized at home and abroad (65.4). It seems like American Catholic theology, in some of its authors, met those demands during this and the next period. But does it add up to a distinctive American theology? I postpone a judgment on that to the conclusion of the next and final section.

The Francis Moment: 2013–2019

Pope Francis is not a theologian, and theology during these last few years has been continuous with the previous creative period. But I use this brief period to bring this story to a close. At the same time, Francis has positively stimulated theological writing.

52. James Hennessey in 50.4; Patricia Byrne in 56.2.

Theology as a Discipline

Catholic theology was anything but mono-methodological during this period. The topics of *TS*, too, roamed around the sources of theology: for example inspiration (74.3) and church Magisterium (75.3). John Thiel looked again at tradition from the perspective of an aesthetic imagination (75.4). Gerald O'Collins and David Braithwaite in a joint article proposed tradition in terms of our collective memory (76.1). Hal Sanks treated tradition as a process involving change and changelessness (76.2).

The Lonerganians remained active with three articles on the distinction of grace and nature and its impact on theology during this period (75.3, 75.4), and Robert Doran offered a prospectus for a five-volume collaborative work of systematic theology in that framework (76.2). George Karuvelil reconfigured theology within the contours of communication theory to distinguish and clarify the tasks of fundamental and systematic theology (76.4).⁵³ Paul Crowley continued this discussion with an article on the impact of nonbelief in oneself and in others on theological construction (76.1). Catholic systematic theology had already grown so pluralistic in method that James Pambrun, in response to conflict between the methods, invited a turn to Paul Ricoeur and Bernard Lonergan to address critical issues of method and proposed “a strategy of communication among diverse modes of reasoning” (76.3). Looking back from here, one sees the common manual of Catholic theology as a distant memory.

Church and Ecumenism

The themes of church and ecumenism roared back during this short period mainly because of a series of twenty-one articles between 2012–2014 commemorating Vatican II, reporting on its impact on various continents, and proposing how it should be interpreted today from several different angles. Analogously, there were at least nine articles on ecumenism, some of which were stimulated by the anniversary of the Reformation (78.3). In an article entitled “Tactical Ecumenism,” referring to collaborative cross-denominational action, authors Benjamin Durheim and David Farina Turnbloom note the success and the incompleteness of the strategic ecumenism of the dialogues (76.2). And in an important article entitled “Ecumenical Pilgrimage toward World Christianity,” Edmund Chia invites ecclesiology to reflect on the new pluralistic world of Christianity which is not really held together by either the Catholic Church or the World Council of Churches (76.3). Thomas Rausch picked up this theme and ran with it in 78.3. To what extent is the great pluralistic church being fragmented into churches that are unrelated to each other in a great counter-sign to humanity's global unity?

In sum, much attention was directed toward “church” during this period, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*: papal infallibility, reconciliation within the church, communion ecclesiology, the mission of the church, and the relation of church to the world were all engaged.

53. Ligita Ryliskytė suggests that not only analogy but also metaphor be freely used in theology to help communicate and to simulate spirituality.

Liberation Theology

One aspect of a “Francis effect” was his reinforcement of liberation theology’s option for the poor. Juan Carlos Scannone emphasized this in his “Pope Francis and the Theology of the People” (77.1). Massimo Faggioli expanded the idea by finding a resonance between Francis’s concern for the poor and a call in *Gaudium et Spes* for the church to address the many “margins” of life today (74.4). Other articles appositely addressed social sin (77.1), the theology of Jon Sobrino (77.1), and of Virgilio Elizondo (78.1). Feminist theology was implicitly engaged in a philosophical critique of an essentially male anthropology and the idea of complementarity (Daniel Horan, 75.1) and in the ongoing discussion of women deacons (Phyllis Zagano, 72.4).⁵⁴

Strong witnesses to a need of a national consciousness of racism in the United States came from John Nilson’s “James Baldwin’s Challenge to Catholic Theologians and the Church” (74.4), and Jeremy Blackwood’s dialogue with Copeland and Lonergan in order to direct attention to poor women of color (77.3).⁵⁵ Peter Phan took up the desperate problem of migration by using it as a metaphor for understanding a compassionate God in “*Deus Migrator*—God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration” (77.4).

Interfaith Consciousness

The deep interest of religious pluralism to the Christian imagination did not abate in this closing period of our story. Take as an example an article by John Friday on the foundations of interreligious dialogue residing in an anthropology of desire as it relates to religious experience (74.3). Note how many things are being engaged there all at once: anthropology, religious experience, and dialogue with the truly other. On a more practical historical level, Finnish theologian Emil Anton defended Benedict XVI’s firm commitment to interreligious dialogue against many misinterpretations of his thinking (78.4). Several articles along the way drew inspiration from *Nostra Aetate* (74.1, 78.1, 79.1).

By this period, comparative theology seemed to have become an established discipline: no more apologies. Not so: it still had its critics. But Marianne Moyaert of the Netherlands defends the discipline as truly Catholic with good reasons and a strong testimony from Pope Francis (76.1). Catherine Cornille, in a case study of Hindu-Christian notions of discipleship, tightened the dynamics of comparison with five phases or dimensions: intensification, rediscovery, reinterpretation, appropriation, or reaffirmation (77.4). And John Makransky explains what a Buddhist learns from

54. Articles by women in *TS*, and submissions as well, are severely disproportionate to the number of American women theologians. An official editorial policy commits the journal to the promotion of women’s voices in theology (76.4, 674).

55. Many public issues formerly addressed in earlier issues of *TS*, for example, the relation of church and state, gradually found their way into the purview of social ethics. So too in black liberation theology. Thus, the article of Bryan Massingale, “Has the Silence been Broken? Catholic Theological Ethics and Racial Justice” will be noticed in the field of ethics.

reading Gustavo Gutiérrez (75.3). The mere notice of these studies communicates the dynamism of expanding understanding and appreciation.

The theology of religions also continued to thrive in these last years. Besides the continuing relevance of the work of Jacques Dupuis (74.3), Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, using Lonergan, tried to correlate the role of the church and other religions in the one supernatural work of God's salvation (75.2). Three years later, in an important article, he deepened the meaning of Christ's "finality" so that it does not compete with the integrity of other faith traditions (78.2). And Anna Moreland examined the revelatory character of the Qur'an and related it to what Catholic doctrine has called "private" revelation (76.3).

Theology and Science

This area experienced a dramatic impetus in the form of attention focused by Pope Francis's encyclical on ecology. Eight articles and a book discussion of Elizabeth Johnson's *Ask the Beasts* made up the special issue of *TS* on *Laudato Si'* (77.2). Three more articles followed in 2018 (79.2). And in 2014 Thomas Hughson linked together creation theology, the problems of ecology, and the question of collaboration across Christian denominational lines. Here is a place where Christians can act out a common faith in God as creator (75.4).

A more formal discussion of the interchange between theology and science was taken up in four articles on the work of William Stoeger (76.3, 78.2), cosmologist and participant in the dialogue between theology and science. The June issue of 2018 carried two articles that showed constructive confidence in the dialogue between science and theology: one discussed creation, evolution, and spirituality, and the other the theme of hope fostered by Joseph Pieper's intellectual openness.

Doctrinal Loci

Space allows no more than a word about some of the articles that engaged particular doctrines during this period. Recognizing some aspects of the criticism of "onto-theology," Joseph Rivera defended a metaphysical approach to God; metaphysics is the subjective horizon in which the search for the ground of human experience may be conducted (77.4). The meditative metaphysical reading of God by Christopher Pramuk, in dialogue with Merton and Melissa Rafael, offered a feminine manifestation of Wisdom-Sophia as the ground of hope for a suffering humanity (77.1).

Resurrection and salvation continued to engage theological reflection during this period, but it was almost eclipsed by a turn to eschatology. On the one hand, two articles engaged the patristic conception of a universal salvation (76.4); on the other hand, in response to any easy acceptance of universal salvation, Joshua Brotherton insisted on the determinative influence of the relation between grace and freedom and a reluctance to accept some form of predestination (77.3). Eschatology is a fitting end of this story and it invites a conclusion.

An American Theology?

Does this telling of the story of American Catholic theology give grounds for referring to the birth of “an American theology?” Can it be so characterized as having a distinct identity? I conclude this history of the theology reflected in *Theological Studies* with reflection on this question, prefaced by two suppositions.

If there is a distinctive American Catholic theology, it must be envisaged as applying to a corporate body as its subject. This is not the theology of a single theologian or even a small group of theologians, but one generated by a broad body of producers. The notation of names, subject matters, and titles pointed to this corporate authorship. In a large nation with general education and an extensive range of Catholic universities, American Catholic theologians form a large group. They are professionals, many interconnected by several professional societies, who participate in the discipline by reading, teaching, speaking, attending professional conferences, and giving papers. The writing and publishing theologians represent but do not exhaust the productive subject of this theology.

Moreover, as America possesses a pluralistic culture, a theology produced by it will also be pluralistic. This makes characterizing the identity of American theology more difficult; by definition it cannot be monothematic; it cannot be defined exclusively by its content in the sense of positions taken. The identity of American theology has to be described as appealing to different audiences, addressing different problems, representing different constituencies, and sharing different degrees of consensus on multiple intersecting issues. There was a time when “Catholic” and “pluralistic” did not correlate, but that time is past. An American Catholic theology must be as pluralistic as its community, its authors, and its immediate audience.

These descriptive conditions render the question itself somewhat tenuous. Nevertheless, something can be said on these suppositions with a bi-focal analysis that addresses the content and the method of American Catholic theology. Holding these two aspects together will supply leverage to characterize and measure the contents of *TS* for its American distinctiveness. The twin foci of content and method generate the summary and conclusion of this study.

We begin with content: American Catholic theology has included and expanded beyond the demands noted earlier by Phan. Ecumenical theology did not develop greatly during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI partly because of the inactivity of church leadership, partly because interfaith dialogue offered such expansive challenges. But both Christian ecumenism and interfaith dialogue have exploded in the last seven years. We saw how Catholic theologians already think of themselves as one with Protestants without surrender of their distinctiveness. We saw too how sophisticated the dialogical imagination became with regard to other religions. Simply looking at other Christians and other religions with friendly eyes has opened up new insights and questions; comparative theology expanded understanding, and critical reflection changed perspectives.

Liberation theology too became black, womanist, feminist, and Latino/a. The correlation with identity groups is not competitive but has thickened the analysis; all these theologies were addressed to the whole of America and implicitly beyond. The

emergence of the challenge from and dialogue with science seemed more sudden. Like the “religions,” what was looked upon with suspicion has suddenly offered a possibility of new learning. Evolution, lurking behind the Vatican sanctions of 1950, became the spine of a new way of thinking theologically. And eco-theology has evolved into a new theological subdiscipline.

These developments into diverse sets of perspectives that orient theological reflection have seeded all the loci of doctrinal theology with new questions that have not nearly been fully answered. The tension between a traditional supernaturalism and the demands of relevance by society and science has not been resolved. The stage is set for continued theological development. Do these developments point to an American Catholic theology or the dissolution of it into fragments?

We turn to method for some light. An analysis of the explicit method of theology, or the method implied in its practice, might contribute to a holistic understanding of what is going on here. Reflection on the discipline itself over the past forty years has been intense: what was done somewhat spontaneously after the council was then constantly subjected to scrutiny. In a necessarily schematic way, the following four points capture and recapitulate some moves that were noticed along the way and were new and distinctive relative to the theology done before the council.⁵⁶

First, a method of correlation ran explicitly or implicitly in the practice of the theology during this period. This refers broadly to reflecting on theological issues in conjunction with experience. Negatively, this meant that the starting point of an argument was not a statement of authoritative sources, but a question or a problem that needed resolution. In some respect these were American problems when the authorship was American, but not exclusively so. Positively, the turn to experience did not mean “I decide on the basis of my experience,” but was either an internalized sense of the social existential American context or an appeal to it as embodying the questions that demand an answer. This could be as broad and diffuse as “people are asking this question,” or as pointed as “history and science demonstrate that reality itself is random.” If this sensibility is not confined to a narrow inner-church culture, but reflects an internalization of common social issues, we already have the grounds and a place to look for indications of an American theology.

Second, thinking theologically during this period has entailed historical consciousness. We saw how that was the main problem that called forth reflection on the discipline itself: all thought is bound in some way to historical particularity. This required a non-deductive critical use of Scripture and a future-oriented approach to relevant meaning: it invited a narrative perspective on issues. We also saw how the dialogue with science, particularly evolution, correlated with historical consciousness. Murray set the tone here very early in the history of *TS*. The current Catholic teaching on church–state relations did not add up in an American context. This set the question, negatively and positively, and he turned to history for the elements of a resolution.

56. One of the qualities of American theology during this period is polarization. Parallel to the progressive moves noted here runs a traditional theology critical of it and resistant to it with different shades of degree along a spectrum.

Third, social consciousness relates to awareness of the interdependence of people at the same time across social networks and is reflected in a sense of social responsibility. Social consciousness generated liberation theologies, bridged theology and ethics, and provided a wide context for reworking the understanding of basic Christian symbols such as sin, grace, and salvation. This broad statement helps to link the many liberation theologies to a common human cause of releasing the bonds of freedom, so central to American mythology, and allows one to appreciate the uniting power within these theologies. Black liberation theology is American, born of slavery and the civil rights movement; feminist liberation theology is American, born of sexism and the suffragist movement; Latino/a liberation is an American appropriation of Latin American liberation theology, sustained by systemic discrimination. They have released their energy into the whole discipline: a systematic theology without social relevance has little value.

And fourth, this period in American Catholic theology reflected American pluralism which is held together as one out of the many and the different. This idea of a deeper unity that can allow difference to flourish underlies ecumenism and interfaith exchange. The Vatican Council marked a clear turning away from exclusivism toward openness to the world, and toward acceptance of difference as a possible bearer of truth, although this has not yet been fully worked out. This does not mean that all the theologians cited here agree with the others so cited. But there is a set of American values that allows and sustains the interchange. On the one hand, then, this pluralism is so overt that it seems to attack the very idea of any kind of holistic picture of an American Catholic theology. On the other hand, the same thing could be said of the many books that make up the New Testament. The volumes of *TS* hold all these theologies between its covers. One needs an open, inclusive, analogical imagination, connected to language, place, and a working body of theologians, to perceive the integral identity of an American Catholic theology.

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